

Message Text

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73

ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 SAJ-01

NIC-01 IO-14 HEW-08 DRC-01 /125 W

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R 091730Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4709

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

USMISSION NATO

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

DIA WASHDC//AA-2 AND DI-5//

C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 6426

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IT

SUBJECT: MAY 12 DIVORCE REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN

REF: ROME 6127

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. IN TIS LAST WEEK, MAY 12 DIVORCE REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN

HAS INTENSIFIED NOTABLY AND CONTINUES TO BE CHARACTERIZED BY BOTH

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EMOTIONAL POLITICAL APPEALS AND EQUALLY EMOTIONAL ARGUMENTS ON

MERITS OF ISSUE. COMPLEXITY OF FACTORS WHICH WILL DETERMINE VOTER'S CHOICE IN THIS UNIQUE BALLOTING LEAVE BOTH SIDES VERY MUCH UNCERTAIN OF OUTCOME. END SUMMARY.

2. REFERENDUM BATTLE HAS RISEN TO CRESCENDO IN FINAL WEEK OF CAMPAIGNING, MARKED BY STRONG ANTI-DIVORCE STATEMENTS BY ITALIAN CHURCHMEN AND VATICAN PRESS AND RADIO. CAMPAIGN THEMES CONTINUE TO REFLECT BLEND OF MORAL, SOCIOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL ARGUMENTS DESIGNED TO APPEAL TO ALL SECTORS OF ELECTORATE AND TO ENCOURAGE DEFECTIONS FROM OPPOSING CAMPS. FURTHER CONFUSING PUBLIC OPINION IS "LAW AND ORDER" ISSUE DRAMATICALLY RAISED BY "RED BRIGADE" KIDNAPPING OF GENOA MAGISTRATE (ROME 6204 NOTAL) AND RECENT DISTURBANCES IN SALERNO PROVINCE (NAPLES 408 NOTAL). LEADERS OF SMALL DEMOCRATIC LAY PARTIES (PSDI, PLI, PRI), WHOSE CAMPAIGNS WERE SLOW TO GET MOVING, ARE NOW IN THICK OF THE BATTLE, TARGETING THEIR ARGUMENTS ON NARROW SUBSTANTIVE ISSUE PRESENTED. DEMOCRATIC PRO-DIVORCE PARTIES ARE ALL SEEKING TO KEEP THEIR DISTANCE FROM COMMUNISTS AS EVIDENCED BY EXCLUSION OF PCI LEADERS FROM FINAL ROME RALLY SCHEDULED MAY 10, AT WHICH LA MALFA, MALAGODI, SARAGAT AND NENNI WILL ALL APPEAR, AS IN POLITICAL ELECTIONS, CAMPAIGNING MUST CEASE FRIDAY MIDNIGHT. POLLS WILL BE OPEN ALL DAY SUNDAY AND UNTIL 2 P.M. MONDAY. COUNTING WILL COMMENCE IMMEDIATELY THEREAFTER. IF RACE IS CLOSE, OUTCOME MAY NOT BE APPARENT UNTIL SOMETIME TUESDAY.

3. EMBASSY CONTACTS ON BOTH SIDES REMAIN WORRIED AND UNCERTAIN, FREQUENTLY ADMITTING THAT MEANINGFUL PREDICTION IS IMPOSSIBLE. LAST MAJOR NATIONAL ELECTORAL CONTEST WAS PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION OF JUNE 1972, IN WHICH FORCES WHICH FAVOR DIVORCE OUTPOLLED THOSE WHICH OPPOSE DIVORCE BY APPROXIMATELY 52 TO 48 PERCENT IN POPULAR VOTE. HOWEVER, DIVORCE WAS NOT AN ISSUE OF SIGNIFICANCE IN THAT CAMPAIGN, AND IT IS NOW BROADLY CONCEDED THAT A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER IF ITALIANS HOLD DIFFERENT VIEWS ON THIS NARROW ISSUE FROM THOSE ESPOUSED BY THE PARTIES FOR WHIC THEY ROUTINELY VOTE. THUS, MANY DC LEADERS PRIVATELY CONCEDE THEIR PARTY WILL SUFFER SIGNIFICANT DEFECTIONS AMONG YOUNGER AND MORE SOPHISTICATED OF THEIR TRADITIONAL SUPPORTERS WHO FEEL THAT, NOTWITHSTANDING CHURCH TEACHING, MODERN SOCIETY REQUIRES CIVIL DIVORCE LEGISLATION. THESE PEOPLE DO NOT ACCEPT ARGUMENT THAT ANTI-DIVORCE VOTE REQUIRED ON POLITICAL GROUNDS. CONFIDENTIAL

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SIMILARLY, THE NEO-FASCIST MSI COULD HAVE TROUBLE DELIVERING THE MORE ANTI-CLERICAL OF ITS HARDCORE SUPPORTERS AND OF ITS NEWLY-WON "PROTEST VOTE" OF RECENT YEARS. ON THE OTHER HAND, COMMUNISTS AND TO LESSER EXTENT SOCIALISTS ARE KNOWN TO FEAR MAJOR DEFECTIONS AMONG WORKING CLASS SUPPORTERS, WHO VIEW DIVORCE AS AN EXPENSIVE MIDDLE-CLASS LUXURY, AND AMONG WOMEN WHO PERCEIVE IN DIVORCE A POTENTIAL THREAT TO THEIR AND THEIR CHILDREN'S SECURITY. COMPLICATING THE PROBLEM FOR THE COMMUNISTS IS PCI'S HISTORIC RELIANCE UPON

ANTI-GOVERNMENT "PROTEST" SENTIMENTS, WHICH ARE NOT BROUGHT DIRECTLY INTO FOCUS BY NARROW DIVORCE QUESTION CONFRONTING VOTERS ON THIS OCCASION. INTENSE "POLITICIZING" OF ISSUE THROUGHOUT CAMPAIGN BY PCI, AND TO A LESSER EXTENT THE DC, WILL TEND TO KEEP POTENTIAL DEFECTORS FROM BOTH SIDES IN LINE, BUT TO WHAT EXTENT ON EACH SIDE IS ANYBODYS GUESS.

4. CONVERSELY, THE DEMOCRATIC LAY PARTIES OF THE CENTER (SOCIAL DEMOCRATS, REPUBLICANS AND LIBERALS), WHICH IN 1972 WERE SUPPORTED BY ABOUT 12 PER CENT OF THE ELECTORATE, FEAR SIGNIFICANT DEFECTIONS ON "POLITICAL" GROUNDS. THEIR LARGELY MIDDLE-CLASS FOLLOWINGS OVERWHEMINGLY WOULD FAVOR DIVORCE ON THE MERITS, BUT MANY MAY BE TEMPTED TO SUPPORT THE ANTI-DIVORCE FORCES BECAUSE OF THEIR STRONG ANTI-COMMUNIST SENTIMENTS.

5. COMPLICATING ISSUE STILL FURTHER IS STRONG EVIDENCE THAT SOME VOTERS STILL DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE EFFECT OF A "YES" (TO REPEAL) OR A "NO" (NOT TO REPEAL) VOTE. MOREOVER, IT IS COMMONLY EXPECTED THAT CONFUSION AND POSSIBLY DISINTEREST WILL PRODUCE SMALLER VOTER TURNOUT THAN IN POLITICAL OR ADMINSTRATIVE ELECTIONS, ALTHOUGH AT WHOSE EXPENSE IS NOT APPARENT.

6. THUS, IN THIS UNIQUE AND POLITICALLY FAR-REACHING BALLOTING, THE USUAL TOOLS FOR PRE-ELECTORAL ANALYSIS HAVE LARGELY BEEN REPLACED BY IMPONDERABLES. IN THESE FINAL STAGES, THE CAMPAIGN HAS BECOME A COMPLEX BLEND OF APPEALS TO POLITICAL LOYALTIES AND EMOTIONS, AND OF INTENSIVE ARGUMENTS ON THE MORAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL MERITS OF DIVORCE. THERE IS NO GUAGE AS TO THE EXTENT TO WHICH EACH OF THESE TWO CRITERIA WILL INFLUENCE VOTER DECISIONS IN THE VARIOUS SECTORS OF THE ELECTORAL SPECTRUM, BUT OBVIOUSLY THE OUTCOME WILL DEPEND UPON THE RELATIVE BALANCE OF DEFECTION SUFFERED BY THE CONTENDING FORCES, BE THEY POLITICALLY OR SUBSTANTIVELY MOTIVATED. MOST OBSERVERS ASSUME THAT THE VERDICT

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WILL BE CLOSE.

7. COMMENT. IN UNEXPECTED EVENT OF A LARGE MARGIN OF VICTORY FOR EITHER SIDE, FUTURE CENTER LEFT COLLABORATION WOULD BE SEVERELY JEOPARDIZED. HOWEVER, IF, AS MOST EXPECT, OUTCOME IS RELATIVELY CLOSE, DESTABILIZING EFFECT UPON COALITION COULD BE HELD TO MINIMUM IF ALL COALITION LEADERS SO DESIRE.

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